



# House Democrats Press Office

Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591

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Thursday, June 08, 2023

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## Hartford Courant

***Bond package approved in final hours as CT legislature beats midnight deadline for session's end***

By Christopher Keating

State legislators raced late Wednesday night to beat a constitutional deadline of midnight, passing key bills in the final hours of the 2023 legislative session.

The most expensive item approved by both chambers in the final hours was \$2.5 billion for the annual bond package that also includes about \$1 billion in school construction projects in Hartford, Darien, Norwich, and Cheshire, among others.

Following a relatively brief debate, the state House of Representatives voted 145-4 with the negative votes cast by conservative Republicans. Soon after, the state Senate approved the package by 35-1 at about 10 p.m. with Sen. Rob Sampson, one of the legislature's most conservative members, voting against.

With the work concluded, Gov. Ned Lamont delivered the traditional end-of-session speech early Thursday morning in the historic Hall of the House. He spoke for literally less than 2 minutes.

"I want to say, in all seriousness, a job well done," Lamont said as he opened his remarks. "I want to say, in all seriousness, particularly what you did on the budget — getting that done, on time, with such strong, bipartisan support, I think sends a message."

Lamont told lawmakers: "I think you showed us a different way. I think you showed us the Connecticut way, and I'm really proud of that. With that, let me just go to my prepared remarks, if you don't mind. Have a good night. You really deserved it."

The crowd laughed in unison and applauded before heading home.

During the final four hours before adjournment, lawmakers began debating the huge, 274-page bond package that includes billions of dollars for construction projects around the state.

The bond projects include improvements at the Connecticut Convention Center and XL Center in Hartford, Rentschler Field in East Hartford, crumbling foundations, flooding in Bridgeport, economic development in East Hartford and renovation of the Middletown Library service center, among others. The detailed bill also includes \$20 million to deter wrong-way driving, \$10 million for Gampel Pavilion on the UConn campus in Storrs, and \$60 million over two years for deferred maintenance at the UConn Health Center in Farmington.

The money would not be spent, however, until approval from the 10-member State Bond Commission that is chaired by Lamont.

During the daylong marathon, the House and Senate spent long hours debating lengthy legislation on public education and affordable housing, which guaranteed that numerous other bills would fail as there was no room for debate as time expired.

When the day started, 265 bills were still pending in the Senate, and hundreds more were pending in the House on the 46-page calendar. Senate Republicans staged a final-day filibuster that lasted more than 9 1/2 hours on a single bill on affordable housing, crowding out the time for other bills.

The final day also saw extended debate in the House on Senate Bill 1, an omnibus education package that addresses spending transparency, diversity, future curriculum development, air quality, workforce growth, bullying and school climate among its 85 items.

The legislation requires school districts to annually report financial data to the state education department in new state-specified expenditure categories. Currently, districts categorize spending into nine groups that critics have called overly broad and vague. The new system will allow the public to better identify where funding is coming from and where it is going.

The House voted 151-0 in a relatively rare unanimous vote where all members were present. The bill had passed the Senate in a 24-12 vote on June 1 after a marathon debate that resulted in the elimination of a number of proposals found in the original language.

## **Affordable housing**

Shortly after 12 noon, the Senate started debating a watered-down housing bill that had started with high hopes months ago but turned out not to have the votes for passage in its original form.

The debate lasted until about 9:30 p.m. before the bill was approved by 23-13 with all Republicans and Democratic Sen. Cathy Osten voting against.

For decades, Connecticut residents have complained about a lack of affordable housing across the state. The legislature tried to tackle the decades-long problem with a 90-page bill, but the measure was dismantled because it lacked support among many lawmakers who want to avoid “one size fits all” mandates for diverse municipalities.

Sen. Marilyn Moore, a Bridgeport Democrat who co-chairs the housing committee, said the final version did not place mandates on the towns.

“Nobody is forcing anything,” Moore said on the Senate floor. “Somebody said this bill is all carrots and no sticks. I didn’t even know what that term meant.”

“We all have to dig down and figure out the answer and not push any one answer,” she said.

The latest bill reduces fees for permits, increases fines for housing violations, prevents housing discrimination due to sexual orientation, and places limits on rental application-related fees, among other things.

Moore said it is ironic that self-storage depots are a growing business across Connecticut as secure spots to temporarily keep items that can no longer fit in a house or an apartment.

“We have such an abundance that we have storage, but we’re not building for the homeless,” Moore said.

Among other things, Moore said the state needs to help update dilapidated buildings with inefficient doors and leaky windows.

“The money is literally going out the windows and doors,” she said. “Builders want to build, and sometimes we have to give them an incentive. ... Either we take care of this now when we have an opportunity or we wait until people are homeless. Either you pay now or you pay later. ... We have to have open space. Yes, we do. But we also have to have a place for people to live.”

“We can’t keep building market rate and keep pushing people out of the urban centers,” she said.

“Of course, this is not the bill it started out to be. This started out as Senate Bill 4,” Moore said. “It’s only going to happen if we all work together.”

House majority leader Jason Rojas, an East Hartford Democrat who championed the bill, said recently that the watered-down version does nothing to generate new affordable housing.

After Moore finished, Republican Sen. Ryan Fazio immediately blasted the bill. Fazio represents some of the state’s wealthiest residents in Greenwich and New Canaan, while Moore represents some of the poorest in Bridgeport. The median price of homes sold in Greenwich this year is \$1.7 million — meaning half sold for more and half sold for less.

Even with the changes, the updated bill is still a problem as a “mish mosh” of various policies, Fazio said.

“It’s a clear shot across the bow of local control,” said Fazio. “It’s bad economic policy, and it’s bad legislative process. We can do far better in this state. ... I am very concerned that this bill is the camel’s nose under the tent. ... At the end of the day, this bill has too much bad in it.”

Fazio added, “We’re debating the early steps of one-size-fits-all legislation. We can do affordable housing with local control. ... I urge that we go back to the drawing board.”

The latest housing bill is “basically is a successor of the 8-30 (g) law ... which said that in order to create more housing, we’re going to undercut some of the local planning and zoning regulations,” Fazio said.

The law, which is 30 years old, requires 10% of the housing stock as affordable housing.

“What has 30 years of 8-30 (g) on the books brought?” Fazio asked. “Connecticut has actually seen a very significant increase in the overall poverty rate while this law has been on the books.”

The poverty rate is now about 12%, up from 8% when the law was passed, he said. The state, he said, should avoid “doubling down on all the mistakes of the past.”

Only 29 of the 169 cities and towns have met the controversial housing law’s 10% requirements, he said.

“Doubling down on something that hasn’t worked and generally has generated a lot of rancor in towns ... is a horrendous idea,” Fazio said. “There are better ways of doing this.”

Determining what is affordable under the law is “extraordinarily convoluted,” Fazio said, adding that public housing and deed-restricted spots are counted as affordable.

One solution, he said, is subsidies or tax abatements for market rate housing to be made affordable.

Many town officials are “very, very resentful of the state government” regarding the housing laws, he said.

Bethlehem, a small town in Litchfield County, and Eastford, a tiny town in eastern Connecticut, he said, “have no zoning at all. “You would think those towns would be booming.”

“It will make housing for the average person more expensive,” Fazio said, adding that regulations on landlords could lead to higher costs and rents.

Sampson said he was flabbergasted upon learning about the bill.

“When I first heard Fair Share, I asked: is this an Ayn Rand novel?” Sampson said. “This is government run amok. ... It sends a terrible message. ... How can anyone in their right mind say we’re promoting affordable housing?”

But Lamont, a Greenwich resident for the past 40 years, recently rejected the notion that the state is not making progress on affordable housing. Lamont’s housing bill was inserted into the massive 832-page budget bill that was passed by both chambers.

“We’re doing a lot,” Lamont told Capitol reporters. “Could we do more? Yes. ... I believe in local control. Show me where you want your housing to be. I don’t want to impose that on you.”

During a long speech against the bill, freshman Republican Sen. Jeff Gordon of Woodstock, said that he could keep going.

“I still have a lot of energy today, maybe from all the doughnuts I have been eating today, which have a lot of sugar,” Gordon said.

Republicans called for a 14-member objective working group to craft a plan on housing that would include appointments by both major political parties. The main bill does not have appointees who would be named by Republicans and would have 10 members.

“We all want to get to the same solutions,” said Sen. Tony Hwang, a Fairfield Republican. “The question is how we get there.”

After passage, Moore said that the long-running battle for affordable housing is not over.

“This is a comprehensive bill, but we still have a way to go,” Moore said. “This bill will give us a pathway forward and allow us to come back in a few years and build on it.”

### **Randy Cox bills**

During the final hours, both chambers passed two bills born from the June 2022 New Haven Police Department incident that left 36-year-old paralyzed from the chest down.

While handcuffed in a police transport van, Cox slammed head-first into the wall of the vehicle after the van driver came to an abrupt stop.

The new legislation requires the Police Officer Standards and Training Council to develop a model policy on required seat belt use in police vehicles and requires officers to immediately request

emergency medical services for anyone who experiences an emergency medical condition or is medically unstable.

### **Environmental justice**

An environmental justice bill, SB 1147, passed the House in a 110 to 40 vote.

The bill gives the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Connecticut Siting Council the authority to deny permits for facilities that present a pollution hazard. It also mandates that developers seeking permits provide residents of environmental justice communities an opportunity to “participate in decisions about a proposed new or expanded facility that may adversely affect their environment or health.”

“For far too long, communities across the state have been required or asked to bear a disproportionate burden of the environmental costs and quality of life costs of certain facilities that generate these types of hazards,” said Rep. Joseph Zullo, an East Haven Republican. “I’m glad that we’re moving forward with a plan that’s going to not only help our state develop but that’s going to protect these communities.”

*Courant staff writer Alison Cross contributed to this report.*

## **CT Mirror**

### ***CT Senate passes housing bill following day-long debate***

By Ginny Monk

The state Senate spent nearly the entire last day of the legislative session trapped in a filibuster, with debate over a watered-down version of a omnibus housing bill stretching more than nine hours before lawmakers passed the measure Wednesday night mostly along party lines.

With limited time on the last day of a legislative session, the minority party holds more power to filibuster bills by introducing amendments and simply talking until the clock strikes midnight. Although the legislature has a mechanism to end debate, it’s rarely used. The state has a tradition of unlimited debate.

[Senate Bill 998](#), which aims to improve tenants’ rights and housing quality, heads next to Gov. Ned Lamont’s desk for his signature.

The bill’s passage marks a bittersweet moment for housing advocates and lawmakers who pushed all session for statewide zoning reform that they say would have led to substantial increases in Connecticut’s stock of affordable housing.

One such zoning reform with mandates for towns was [yanked from the bill last week](#). The other didn’t get a vote on the House floor.

Connecticut lacks about [89,000 units of housing that are affordable and available](#) to the lowest-income renters, and thousands more are paying more than a third of their income to housing costs.

“We’re trying to hold onto something that worked 50 years ago,” said Housing Committee chair Sen. Marilyn Moore, D-Bridgeport. “And now we have more people in Connecticut. We have people of all income levels.”

“It has to be inclusive. We can’t build housing projects anymore where you stick low-income people to the side where nobody can see them and then you have all the other people in these houses and buildings,” she said.

The bill notably increases the amount municipalities are allowed to charge for code violations from \$250 to \$2,000, which officials hope will push landlords to improve sub-par rental housing.

State senators’ discussion on the bill that’s primarily focused on tenants’ rights and housing quality touched on a wide array of topics including affordable housing law, economics, zoning reform, local control and even the game of hopscotch.

## **Zoning**

Through the session, zoning reform has been top-of-mind for many lawmakers and advocates. [Research shows that restrictive local zoning](#) ordinances in Connecticut are tied to segregation along income and racial lines, and experts say these ordinances make it hard to build enough multi-family housing to meet demand.

Last week, lawmakers were negotiating a way to include a zoning policy known as “[fair share](#),” which would have required the state to assess the regional need for more affordable housing and divide that need between municipalities. The towns would then be required to plan and zone for a certain number of housing units.

The mandates were stripped from the bill, although it still includes measures that require the state to conduct the housing needs assessment, find a methodology to divide up the need, and tell towns how many units they’d need to have to fulfill the need.

Democrats have said it’s for informational purposes, but “fair share” opponents say they fear it’s a way to set up for mandates.

The bill also puts the Office of Responsible Growth into statute. The office existed because of a years-old executive order.

That office is integral to another zoning reform proposal that died before a vote on the House floor this session known as [Work, Live, Ride](#). That proposal would have offered certain state infrastructure funds to towns that opt to create transit-oriented communities, increasing residential density near train or bus stations.

The bill does include one measure that offers school districts a 5% point increase in their reimbursement rates for school building projects if they’re located in an “inclusive municipality” as determined by the Department of Housing.

The bill language has a handful of parameters for an “inclusive municipality,” including that it has adopted and maintains zoning codes that promote fair housing.

Zoning reform made up the bulk of debate Wednesday, although no such mandates are included in the bill.

Opponents have objected to proposals for statewide zoning reform, saying it divests towns of local control and imposes onerous, one-size-fits all requirements on municipalities.

“I am very deeply concerned that this bill is the camel’s nose under the tent of creating one of the most significant, unfunded mandates on our towns and cities in our state’s history and significantly undoing traditions of local control of our towns and cities,” said Sen. Ryan Fazio, R-Greenwich.

Moore argued that the state needs to consider ways to ensure people aren’t pushed out of certain, wealthier areas.

“If we’re going to build an inclusive Connecticut, we have to build for everyone and we have to learn how to live together,” she said.

## Tenants' rights

While zoning reform has caused the most political consternation over the past few days, the bill's mandates that will affect residents in the coming months are primarily focused on tenants' rights and housing quality.

Since 2021, Connecticut has seen a [growing movement to organize renters](#) and form tenants' unions. These groups have helped draw more attention across the state to some of the issues tenants face, including shoddy and unsafe housing.

S.B. 998 would require that tenants be given the chance to walk through apartments before renting them and limits what landlords can charge for screening reports. They'd also be required to give tenants copies of their screening reports.

It curbs what landlords can charge in late rent fees and requires that the Department of Housing develop standardized leases in English and Spanish.

It would ban small landlords from discriminating against tenants based on their sexual orientation. The change was one of the [governor's suggestions](#) in his renters rights bill.

The bill would also have [courts remove online eviction records](#) within 30 days if the case is withdrawn, dismissed or a judge rules in favor of the tenant. Online records have been shown to make it near-impossible for tenants who have evictions filed against them to find new housing, even if the tenant wins their case.

Some Republicans argued against portions of the bill related to tenants' rights.

Housing Committee ranking member Sen. Rob Sampson, R-Wolcott, said some of the provisions weren't necessary and put too much burden on landlords.

"We're adding more regulation and less freedom and choice for people," Sampson said.

Through the session, [Sampson has frequently argued in support of the free market](#) and against what he views as government interference in private contracts.

Housing advocates have said that such measures help balance power between landlords and tenants and that they view the proposals as part of consumer protection, a role the government routinely fills.

Moore said she'd heard from many tenants through the legislative process about rising rents and people being forced out of their housing.

"It's the beginning of trying to figure out what is best for Connecticut residents in the way of housing," Moore said. "How do we develop housing and help people live in something that's affordable and decent?"

Republicans also criticized the bill because of the way it progressed through the legislature. It was initially a bill on tax abatements for conservation easements that passed the Senate.

When it went to the House, several housing measures from other bills were added to the bill. It passed narrowly through the House with Republicans and some Democrats, mostly from Fairfield County, opposing the bill.

Moore said Wednesday that she thinks the legislature has more to do on housing and sees the bill as just a start.

"I'm appreciative of what we have here," she said. "I think there's more work to be done, but I think we've begun the work of building houses."

## ***CT 2023 legislative session ends with passage of wide-ranging bill***

By Mark Pazniokas

The 2023 session of the Connecticut General Assembly lurched to its constitutionally mandated end at midnight Wednesday, capped by votes on a hastily assembled omnibus bill that offered a last ticket to passage for stalled measures, including a major campaign finance bill.

[House Bill 6942](#) placed a necessary last piece of business — a bond package [authorizing borrowing](#) for school construction and other capital needs — in a 274-page bill that also would double public financing grants for gubernatorial campaigns, among other things.

Negotiated throughout the day, the freshly drafted bill came with a jaw-breaking, all caps title that reflected its broad and eclectic contents:

“AN ACT AUTHORIZING AND ADJUSTING BONDS OF THE STATE AND CONCERNING GRANT PROGRAMS, STATE CONSTRUCTION RELATED THRESHOLDS, SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH AN INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY, FAILURE TO FILE FOR CERTAIN GRAND LIST EXEMPTIONS, ELECTIONS, AND OTHER ITEMS IMPLEMENTING THE STATE BUDGET.”

It was not ready for debate until 8:18 p.m. and sped through both chambers in an hour, seeming to set the stage for validating a claim made hours earlier by House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, that the sprint to midnight on the last day would include “the most fascinating three or four hours in Connecticut politics.”

The reference to elections in the title was a provision aimed at restoring the relevance of public financing to Connecticut’s gubernatorial campaigns after two elections dominated by wealthy self-funders, Gov. Ned Lamont and his Republican opponent, Bob Stefanowski.

The bill would double the grants available to qualified gubernatorial candidates participating in the voluntary Citizens’ Election Program, providing \$3.2 million for a primary, \$15.4 million for the general election and \$806,875 for a new pre-convention grant.

Lamont spent \$25.7 million to win reelection last year in a rematch with his 2018 opponent, Stefanowski, who spent \$14.5 million. Had they opted for public financing, they would have been limited to about \$8 million — roughly the amount Lamont spent on television advertising in the last five weeks of the campaign.

The bill also would raise the contribution limit to the Democratic and Republican state central committees from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Without explanation, the Senate had failed the previous night to pass [Senate Bill 226](#), which addressed the public financing issues that had bipartisan support.

Contents of [House Bill 5001](#), a bipartisan measure to expand resources and support services for residents with intellectual or developmental disabilities was part of the omnibus bill, an effort to save the broadly supported measure from inaction in the Senate.

It was struck from the omnibus bill when Senate leaders concluded they would have time to vote on HB 5001. Passage was unanimous. It came at 11:52 p.m.

But there was less of the frenetic deal-making typical in the last hours of the annual session, particularly in the House. By 10 p.m., the House had little to do as it waited for the Senate to send down bills.

While difficult to negotiate and produce, the omnibus bill was quickly passed by the House and Senate with minimal debate. The House passed it on a vote of 145-2, with Republicans Anne Dauphinais of Killingly and Gale Mastrofrancesco of Wolcott opposed. Senate debate was barely five minutes. It passed, 35-1, with Sen. Rob Sampson, R-Wolcott, opposed.

The General Assembly began its last day with 117 Senate bills awaiting final action in the House and 172 House bills awaiting final action in the Senate. With final passage of a tax-and-spending package the previous day, there was little pressure on lawmakers to deliver on the remaining bills.

The Senate struggled until 9:39 p.m. to pass a single bill, [a watered-down version of Senate Bill 998](#), a measure that affordable housing advocates once hoped would be a vehicle for significant zoning reform. Republicans filibustered for nine hours, not relenting to a roll call vote until after the House sent the omnibus bill to the Senate. The measure passed, 23-13, largely on party lines.

Once the the Senate was done with the housing bill, it quickly picked up the pace, packing a day's work in the final two hours of the session. At 10:04 p.m., the Senate voted 34-1 to pass [House Bill 6930](#), a measure crafted by Comptroller Sean Scanlon after talks with local officials and unions to reform municipal pensions.

By changing how cost-of-living increases are calculated and by re-amortizing the unfunded liability of the municipal pension fund from 17 to 25 years, participating municipalities are projected to save \$32.3 million in the coming fiscal year and \$843 million over the next three decades.

The final bill passed by the Senate was [House Bill 6888](#), a measure [addressing the pre-arrest diversion of children](#), the makeup of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee and plans for transitioning children in the Department of Corrections' custody to the custody of the Judicial Branch. A 26-10 roll call vote was completed at 11:59, the last minute before the constitutional adjournment deadline. Onlookers outside the chamber applauded.

The House operated at a more deliberative pace throughout the day, opening with final passage of Senate Bill 1, referred to as the [education transparency bill](#).

House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, told reporters in the morning that the must-do list in the House was short — primarily the school construction bonding package, Senate Bill 1 and an environmental justice bill.

On the final day, when time is short and the tradition of unlimited debate can be used to talk any bill to death, little can be done without the consensus of both parties. But Ritter, Rojas and House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford, have been adept at sidestepping partisan roadblocks. "We continue to have conversations with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and we're able to strike deals," Rojas said.

"The last day's interesting, right?" Ritter said. "Everybody's equal."

"Obviously, we all know this the make or break day," Candelora said.

The omnibus bill adopted Wednesday night had a provision exempting small towns from the reach of the state's environmental justice law in another bill, [Senate Bill 1147](#). The reason: Rep. Doug Dubitsky, R-Chaplin, said the measure would be onerous to his small community, which is considered an environmental justice community.

With the deletion promised in the omnibus bill, the House passed the measure with little debate.

At least twice Wednesday, opposition by Republicans caused the House Democratic majority to suspend debates on bills without a vote.

[Senate Bill 1086](#), a bill providing protections against "coerced debt" — that is, debt that was incurred in a victim's name by an abusive domestic partner — unanimously passed the Senate a month ago but foundered Wednesday in the House.

Sen. Patricia Billie Miller, D-Stamford, a sponsor, failed to persuade Rep. Craig Fishbein, R-Wallingford, to allow a vote. Fishbein, a practicing lawyer, said he was sympathetic to the goals of the bill, but concluded it did not mesh with existing divorce law.

A seemingly mundane bill, [Senate Bill 1023](#), dealing with the operations of probate courts, ran afoul of Mastrofrancesco, a conservative who objected to a provision that would have had court documents conform with a state law adopting gender-neutral language, such as "birth parent" over "mother."

“I’m highly offended by the terminology that’s in this bill as a woman and as a mother,” Mastrofrancesco said. “We are manipulating our statues to push an ideological, a progressive agenda, a theory that does not exist.”

Debate was suspended while an amendment was prepared. The term Mastrofrancesco found offensive was removed, and the bill would clear both chambers by midnight.

*CT Mirror staff writer Jaden Edison contributed to this report.*

## **CT News Junkie**

### **Connecticut Legislature Greenlights \$5 Billion Bonding**

By Mike Savino

Connecticut lawmakers Wednesday approved a bonding package that calls for roughly \$2.5 billion in borrowing each of the next two fiscal years.

The funding would go to a range of projects, including affordable housing, the State Pier in New London, safety measures to address wrong-way driving, and money for new vote tabulators.

“Bonding projects are often the lifeline of the state,” Senate President Martin M. Looney, D-New Haven said.

The bond package received a 145-4 vote in the House of Representatives, followed shortly after by a 35-1 vote in the Senate.

The borrowing plan authorizes \$2.59 billion in borrowing for fiscal year 2024, and \$2.45 billion the following year.

Sen. John Fonfara, D-Hartford, co-chairman of the legislature’s Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, said the list of projects are “important capital investments in our state, including state buildings, economic development, environmental protection.”

That includes a total of \$600 million toward Gov. Ned Lamont’s housing initiatives: \$100 million each year for flexible housing and \$200 million annually for a Housing Trust Fund to support multi-unit, transit-oriented development.

The bill also authorizes a total of \$150 million over two years for Lamont’s Time To Own initiative, which provides down-payment assistance to qualifying buyers.

Other projects in the bill include \$1 billion for school construction projects around the state.

“I would say every project is significant to the member that requested it,” said Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford. “We’re making improvements around the state.”

The package also authorizes \$151 million in new bonding, including \$10 million in the second year for renovations to Gampel Pavilion, and \$152.4 million in prior authorizations to UConn.

Meanwhile, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system saw \$313.25 million in authorizations, including \$105 million for deferred code compliance and infrastructure improvements.

Other authorizations include \$30 million to the Connecticut Port Authority for dredging and other improvements, which lawmakers said is for the State Pier, and \$30 million for Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas to purchase new voting tabulators.

The package also includes \$3 million in fiscal year 2025 to pay for registrars to get training on the machines. The bill also allows regional councils of government, or COGs, to contract with nonpartisan election advisors.

“I don’t think we take enough advantage of our COGs,” said Rep. Holly Cheeseman, R-East Lyme, said. I know people fight regionalization, but where we consolidate forces and save, particularly our smaller towns, money, I think is a great idea.

Additionally, the bond package authorizes a total of \$606.9 million to the Department of Transportation for road projects.

That number includes \$20 million each year to purchase and install wrong-way driving technology, which notifies state police when a driver enters a highway in the wrong direction and alerts drivers through electronic signs.

The legislature instructed the DOT to install the technology at 120 intersections identified as high risk. Some individual municipalities also benefit from the bond package, notably Bridgeport. The bill includes a total of \$42 million, through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, to repair damage from flooding.

West Hartford, meanwhile, is in line to get \$30 million for water system improvements. That’s on top of competitive grants available to all towns, including \$25 million each year for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program and \$100 million annually for urban development projects through the Office of Policy and Management.

## **CT Examiner**

### ***Legislators End Session Upbeat with Bipartisan Approval of \$51.1B 2-Year Budget***

By Robert Storace

HARTFORD – As state lawmakers lauded the way both parties came together to support a balanced \$51.1 billion two-year spending plan, legislators feverishly worked late Wednesday to put their final touches on last-minute bills – including one featuring a massive education omnibus package – prior to the day’s 11:59 p.m. deadline of voting on legislation.

House Speaker Matt Ritter, a Democrat, echoed the sentiments of lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle who said the bipartisan work he saw this session was evident not only in the lopsided votes in both chambers in favor of the budget, but also in the willingness of Democrats and Republicans to strongly argue their points but also find compromise where necessary.

The approved budget, which had the strong support of Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont, includes an income tax cut benefitting more than 1 million tax filers, or about 60 percent of taxpayers.

“I just read that Oregon hasn’t met in a month because the senators just left the building,” Ritter said in a meeting with reporters Wednesday morning. “Think about that – they meet and they don’t have a quorum. We’ve tried to create a culture in the House whereby people have to learn to compromise – in dealing with [people] stretching from the most affluent communities in Greenwich to rural eastern Connecticut... We are a bit more of a moderate state than I think we want to recognize and sometimes that’s painful. But, I think overall, it’s a good thing because we do work a lot together and Connecticut is very different from many states around the country that way.”

House Minority Leader Vincent Candelora, R-North Branford, late Wednesday in the House Chamber called the past several months “a good productive session.” Candelora thanked Ritter and House

Majority Leader Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, saying, “They worked with us in getting business done. We appreciated the work and the humor.”

The state’s 832-page budget is, by all accounts, daunting.

While some Republican legislators, like Holly Cheeseman, R-East Lyme, the ranking member of the Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee, said they were hoping for deeper tax cuts, ultimately, Cheeseman said, the bill had “no gimmicks” and that she couldn’t in good conscience vote against it. In the end, Rob Sampson of Cheshire was the sole Republican voting against the spending plan, and 41 of 53 Republican House members voted for the measure.

Many of the last-minute bills offered Wednesday on the last day of session were okayed unanimously with little discussion. Other measures, however, sparked heated debates as members looked for support with just hours left in the session.

House members discussed ‘An Act Concerning Transparency in Education’ for several hours Wednesday afternoon with one of the few Republicans voting in favor of the measure making an impassioned plea on behalf of bullied children.

“We need to look at creating a good nurturing school climate, such a climate that takes the entire community into consideration,” said Kathleen McCarty, R-Waterford and a ranking member of the Education Committee.

The act was approved by the State House largely along party lines, 104-47.

Arguing in favor of the omnibus bill, McCarty said the bullying provision of the bill “will be transformational and will make Connecticut a leader in creating a good school climate where we will have fewer incidents of bullying.”

McCarty noted that the bill calls for schools to have a school climate coordinator, a school climate specialist and a school climate committee work with all parties to address incidents of bullying, including teachers, school administrators, parents, the student being bullied as well as the student doing the bullying.

“This is about creating a model school climate and to bring everyone together so everyone feels respected,” McCarty said during the hearings. “Empathy is a very important ingredient here. We want to create healthy and safe schools and we want to move away from being punitive to being restorative.”

Responding to lawmakers who said it appeared the bill was giving an out to bullies, McCarty said, “It is not to not hold the student accountable, but rather to help that student understand from their behavior so that behavior is not repeated,” with the engagement of a new school climate coordinator, school climate specialist and school climate committee.

Jeffrey Currey, D-East Hartford and a member of the Education Committee, said “The laws on bullying the last 20 years haven’t worked. This is not about being soft [on bullies], but about moving in a new direction to make Connecticut a leader on this issue.”

Noting that suicide is the “second highest cause of death of our youth,” McCarty told fellow lawmakers that grants to hire mental health specialists in schools are also part of the bill.

There are several other provisions in the bill related to student resource officers; education apprenticeship initiatives; plans to establish increased educator diversity; teacher recruitment; changes to new wording on expulsions and suspension; and a school meals pilot program for Alliance Districts, among others.

A provision to mandate in-person training for local school board members, however, was met with strong opposition by several Republican members.

“There isn’t much in this legislation that gets me excited to support it,” said Rachel Chaleski, R-Danbury. “The bill is overreaching. I take issue from taking marching orders from the state.”

And, Tammy Nuccio, R-Tolland, said: “Training for board of education members? I don’t know that we can mandate someone be trained by someone or something. I’m concerned about mandated training for elected officials.”

Officials claimed there was money in the state budget to cover all aspects of the education bill, but the bill itself didn’t come with a price tag.

The State Senate spent about nine hours discussing SB 998, housing and zoning bill ‘An Act Establishing a Tax Abatement for Certain Conservation Easements.’ The measure passed 23-13, by a near party line vote.

Voting against the bill was Ryan Fazio, R-Greenwich, who said during the debate: “This is a shot across the bow against our centuries-old tradition of local control. It is the product of bad legislative process.... This newly amended bill contains new policies which never had the benefit of a full public hearing, and it represents a mish-mosh of different bills which contradict each other.”

Several Republican House members also took issue with “An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Issues Related to the Repeal of the Motor Vehicle Property Tax.”

The measure passed 87-63 without Republican support.

Opponents included Joe Zullo, R-East Haven, who argued that getting rid of the motor vehicle tax would translate into hikes in other taxes.

“We will have homeowners insurance policies go up. If we want to look at solutions to repealing the motor vehicle property tax levels, let’s look at all solutions, not just a few,” Zullo said. “We worked hard to achieve middle class tax relief, but if you own a house you will get whacked here.”

Doug Dubitsky, R-Chaplin, warned the bill would have “unintended consequences.”

“We go into these things with blinders on without seeing the unintended consequences,” Dubitsky said. “Towns will get hit one way or another. If you stop taxing cars it will mean an increased tax on your house ... We create a lot of problems we try to fix. Getting rid of the car tax will mean less affordable housing.”

Ritter called passage of “An Act Concerning the Environmental Justice Program of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection” one of his top priorities. The bill passed the House 110-40 without opposition late Wednesday.

The measure, which had the strong support of leaders from large urban centers in the state, is aimed at poorer and distressed communities and neighborhoods with significant minority populations.

The bill provides DEEP and the Connecticut Siting Council the power to deny permits – with input from community members – for new and expanded facilities including electricity generating plants with a capacity of more than 10 megawatts, sludge or solid waste incinerators, and sewage treatment plants with a capacity of more than 50 million gallons per day.

Irene Haines, R-East Haddam, said the bill “is very transparent. I do like this legislation.”

Geraldo Reyes, D-Waterbury, said environmental justice is “a topic I’ve been talking about for eight years. It’s why I came to Hartford. This is a good step in the right direction, as Waterbury is a poster child for environmental justice.”

Dubitsky, who represents the small northeastern town of Chaplin, said he disagrees “with the concept of this bill.”

“I understand this legislature feels it needs to protect people, however, in my town, a distressed community and an environmental justice community, we’d never be able to have a facility in our town without the permission of the state,” Dubitsky said. “A town like mine should be able to make up its own mind. Small towns like mine are collateral damage. We get swept in with big cities and have to accept the consequences.”

Earlier in the week, the State House and Senate voted to increase funding for both higher education and K-12; voted to give a 2.5 percent cost of living increase in Fiscal Year 2024 to non-profit providers — they had asked for 9 percent in 2024 and 7 percent in 2025 — voted to deposit \$3.3 billion into a Rainy Day Fund; and approved a measure that includes steep cuts to Shore Line East funding.

## **Hearst CT Media**

### ***Legislature passes bill giving those who committed crimes before age 21 a chance at parole***

By Alex Putterman

Some people incarcerated for offenses committed before age 21 will be newly eligible for parole under a bill passed by both houses of Connecticut's legislature.

Proponents say the bill, which now heads to Gov. Ned Lamont for final approval, reflects [research](#) showing that brain development continues into a person's 20s and that people who commit crimes at young ages are highly capable of growth and rehabilitation.

The legislation would grant a chance at parole to people who committed offenses before age 21 on or before Oct. 5, 2005 and were sentenced to at least 10 years in prison. Under current law, that opportunity is available to those whose offenses came before age 18.

Separately, the bill tweaks the law regarding when driving under the influence convictions can be expunged. Those convictions will now be eligible to be erased only after 10 years (as opposed to after seven currently) and only as long as the person in question is not convicted of another DUI in that time. Following a series of amendments narrowing the bill, the House passed a final version of the proposal by a 100-48 vote late Monday night, with most Democrats in support and many Republicans in opposition. The Senate took up the bill Tuesday evening and passed it 30-6, with only a handful of Republicans voting against it.

Sen. Gary Winfield, D-New Haven, who co-chairs the legislature's Judiciary Committee, said the parole proposal originated in part from a series of U.S. Supreme Court cases finding that harsh sentences for young people fail to account for the fact their brains are not fully developed.

"There was an attempt to conform our laws to the notion that the brain doesn't develop until 25," Winfield said. "There was a discussion about the fact that that was probably a step too far for some folks, so we settled on 21."

Sen. Stephen Harding, R-Brookfield, was one of the six Republicans who opposed the bill Tuesday, arguing it undermines initial sentences passed down by judges.

"I have some reservations about expanding that incredible power that the Board of Pardons and Paroles has, which is overriding judges' decisions," Harding said.

In its [initial version](#), the bill would have granted a chance at parole to anyone serving a long sentence whose offense came before age 25. It [passed the Senate](#) last month after being amended to lower the age to 21, then passed the House after an amendment established a cutoff date of Oct. 5 2005.

Proponents of the amendment argued that it should apply specifically to people who were sentenced during a previous era, when Connecticut's justice system was more punitive.

The Senate ultimately passed the House's version Tuesday, sending the bill to Lamont, who has not indicated whether he plans to sign it.

## **Waterbury Republican-American**

### ***Lamont hails ‘the Connecticut way’ in closing victory speech***

By Paul Hughes

HARTFORD – A triumphant Gov. Ned Lamont delivered a victory speech after the General Assembly session adjourned Wednesday following the approval of a record reduction in the state income tax that he proposed.

Democratic and Republican legislators were also in the mood to celebrate the bipartisan approval of rate cuts that will lower income taxes on first \$50,000 in taxable income for single filers, \$80,000 for heads of household and \$100,000 for joint filers.

“Have a good night. You really deserve it,” Lamont declared in a short and sweet closing address to a joint convention of the House and Senate in a packed House chamber.

The approved two-year, \$51.1 billion state budget reduces the bottom two marginal rates starting with the 2024 tax year. The initial 3% rate is dropping to 2% and the second 5% rate to 4.5%. The savings will add up to \$185.6 million in the first year of the budget cycle and \$412.2 million in the second year. Every Democratic representative and senator voted for the budget bill, and just one Republican senator and only 12 Republican representatives voted against the spending and tax package.

Lamont called the budget vote an example of what he called “the Connecticut way.”

“It is special. Don’t take it for granted. I look around the country. California has deficits in the tens of billions of dollars, and Oregon is having a hard time getting the senators to even show up, and even Congress is locked down again right now. I hope that is briefly,” he said, “and you showed us a different way. I think you showed us the Connecticut way.”

This was the second two-year budget plan to receive bipartisan approval since Lamont took office, but the Democratic governor and Democrat-controlled legislature had to separately pass a mileage tax on heavy trucks to win Republican votes in 2021. No Republicans voted for the highway user tax that year. Republicans had called that a bipartisan budget for the last two years, but some have taken to calling it a compromise budget and referring to this year’s compromise as a bipartisan budget.

There still will be plenty of partisan dickering and bickering over the budget’s adoption. Republicans say they drove the discussion on tax cuts and fiscal responsibility. Democrats and Lamont have a different take, though they do acknowledge Republican contributions.

The courtesy and considerate behavior displayed in the budget deliberations, of course, did not extend to other major legislation that cleared the legislature on abortion, guns and other issues that divide Democrats and Republicans in Connecticut and beyond.

And, there were plenty of disagreements between Democrats and Republicans on the final day of the legislative session.

At the day’s start, the House and Senate each had nearly 300 bills remaining on their respective calendars, and most were unlikely to survive and get a shot at possibly becoming state law — a reality not lost on legislators and other players racing against the clock to pass or block legislation.

But the hope or threat of passage, whatever the case might be, is always a powerful motivator.

“From about 8 to 12, I think it is most fascinating three or four hours in Connecticut politics,” said House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford.

The legislature got the biggest piece of business done on the second-to-last day Tuesday. The House and Senate approved the budget bill. But the budget debates and votes consumed precious, irreplaceable time in the dwindling hours of the session.

“We didn’t anticipate the budget would be this late,” said House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford.

But two big pieces of budget-related business remained to be completed before the constitutional adjournment deadline — a two-year bonding bill chock full of funding for projects and organizations in legislators’ districts, and the annual school construction funding bill.

The House and Senate eventually passed a \$5 billion bonding bill that authorizes nearly \$2.6 billion in bonding for the 2024 fiscal year and \$2.5 billion for the 2025 fiscal year. The school construction bill was folded into the bond package.

Adjournment day is always a day of hostage taking, deal making and, in a legislative body with a closely guarded tradition of unlimited debate, filibustering. The possibility of a prolonged debate is enough to doom a bill. But filibusters cut both ways.

Filibusterers could end up assuring their favored bills die on the calendar, too. The majority also retains options, including calling the question to cut off debate if delay tactics are taken to an extreme, or convening a special session to take up the stalled bill and perhaps other legislation that the filibustering legislators oppose.

Senate Republicans ground business in the upper legislative chamber to a glacial crawl debating a single housing bill for more than seven hours. Debate was temporarily halted for a roll-call vote on a group of bills called a consent calendar that Democrats and Republicans agreed to OK without debate. The debate on the housing bill and the GOP slowdown resumed after the approval of the set of 14 House bills and a Senate bill the House amended earlier Wednesday.

“This process sometimes boils down to jamming bills through both chambers quickly on the final few days with a sense of urgency, but that’s where I come in, Madam President,” said Sen. Robert C. Sampson, R-Wolcott. “I am the backstop against urgency because ... while I don’t have enough votes sometimes to overcome the majority’s will and desire for certain policy items, I do have the ability to get up and speak about it. So, that’s what I plan to do here today.”

But Sampson did not end up filibustering up until the constitutional adjournment. Senate Democrats prevailed upon Senate Republicans to give Sampson the hook.